



**Genital Skin
Care**



Highland Sexual Health

<https://www.highlandsexualhealth.co.uk/>

General Information

Genital skin problems are common. This may be due to an underlying general skin problem such as psoriasis or eczema, or a more specific genital skin problem such as lichen sclerosis. Irritants or an underlying infection may also cause skin problems. Whatever the underlying cause, the following information can benefit everyone.

There are many irritants that come into contact with genital skin which can cause or aggravate skin problems. These include many washing products, intimate hygiene products, sanitary products, dyes in clothing or toilet paper, laundry detergents, and fabric softeners. So here are some tips for what to use and what to avoid. Even if you have used the same product for years, the ingredients in those products may have changed.

Washing Advice

It is recommended to wash the genital skin daily (from twice daily to alternate days is acceptable, but more or less often can cause problems). Use warm water to wash between the folds (of vulva or under foreskin) but avoid washing internally. Emollient soap substitutes can be used, and can help moisturise, soothe, and heal the skin. Avoid scented soaps and shower gels, as the fragrances and preservatives can cause irritation to delicate genital skin. Be careful if using a cloth or sponge as they can be rough and cause damage to the skin. After washing, ensure that the skin is properly patted dry (including the folds of the vulva or under the foreskin). If you are prone to genital symptoms developing after sex, it may help to wash and dry the genital skin shortly after sex.

Treatments

● *Emollients*

Emollients such as Dermol, E45, Diprobase and Zerobase (many other brands available) can be used as soap substitutes in the bath or shower and can be left on as a moisturiser. Aqueous cream can be used as a soap substitute but is not recommended to leave on as a moisturiser as it can cause irritation. If you are prone to genital skin problems, regular use of emollients can help protect the skin and prevent flare ups. You may have to try a few different products before finding the one that is best for you. These are all available to buy from pharmacies, or on prescription from your GP. If you find any product is causing redness or irritation, discontinue and seek advice.

● *Barrier Ointments*

Persistent exposure to moisture, such as urine, diarrhoea, sweat, secretions or discharge, can cause irritation to genital and anal skin. Protecting the skin with a barrier ointment such as Hydromol, Cetraben, or Zeroderm, prevents contact with the skin and helps with healing. These can be applied morning and night and after washing and toileting. These come in tubs of different sizes, and are available to buy from your pharmacy or on prescription from your GP.

● *Lubricants*

Some genital skin conditions can be aggravated during intercourse. Hypoallergenic lubricants can help minimise trauma to the skin by reducing rub and friction. Recommended brands include YES, TLC and Sylk, which are available to buy online, at your pharmacy, or from your GP.

Caution: Oil based products can cause condoms to break.

Dos and Dont's

Washing and hygiene products

Irritants can be present in many washing and hygiene products. Avoid wet wipes, intimate hygiene products, scented shower gel and soaps, bath additives, and deodorants. Avoid using panty liners and sanitary towels regularly, as they can cause skin reactions. Avoid coloured toilet paper.

Cotton based, unbleached, non-fragranced sanitary products such as NatraCare are better tolerated by people with sensitive skin.

Beauty Products & Treatments

Avoid nail varnish on your fingernails if you are prone to itching. Keep your nails short to reduce damage to the skin from scratching or try wearing gloves at night.

Shaving and waxing pubic hair can cause damage to the skin, increasing the risk of folliculitis, ingrown hairs and shaving rashes. Hair removal creams can cause skin reactions. Trimming the hair instead is recommended.

Remedies & medicaments

Creams and topical treatments including baby/nappy creams, herbal creams and remedies (e.g. tea tree, aloe vera), antiseptics, thrush treatments can contain irritants. Avoid using antiseptics on genital skin or added to the bath.

Lubricants and latex condoms can also be irritants.

Clothing & Laundry

Dark cloth dyes can cause irritation, so avoid dark coloured underwear. Avoid biological washing detergents and fabric softeners. Wash your underwear using a fragrance free, non-biological washing detergent such as Ecover Zero laundry liquid. Cotton underwear is more absorbent and breathable, so is better for the skin.

Tips for itchy or sore ano-genital skin

It can be difficult to resist the urge to itch, especially at night when you are asleep. Scratching the skin causes damage and keeps the itch-scratch-itch cycle going, so it is important to break this cycle. Keeping fingernails short prevents damaging the skin, or you can try wearing gloves at night. Instead of itching, try pinching the skin firmly between thumb and fingertip – this gives relief without damaging the skin.

Applying an emollient regularly soothes the skin and eases discomfort. Anti-itch creams containing crotamiton or menthol may be of benefit, however evidence is not strong.

When cleaning after going to the toilet, try applying some lotion onto the toilet paper before you wipe. This reduces irritation from the paper, gives a better clean, and soothes the skin.